



early risers

Waking up to racial equity
in early childhood.

Discussion Guide

Season 3, Episode 2: *Disrupting the bias within us* released June 15, 2022

Learning Goal: Discuss the impact that unhealed generational trauma has on our behaviors as adults, specifically micro-aggressive behaviors, and how this affects our interactions with, and between, children.

Suggested Conversation Length: 60 minutes



Early Risers is a podcast focused on how to talk with young children about race. Hosted by Dianne Haulcy, the podcast invites early childhood experts into conversations about how parents, caregivers and early childhood educators can tackle this big topic with the little ones in their lives.

Background

Many adults feel caught off guard when children bring up race and racism in an unexpected way, and these moments can be stressful and intense. It is important for us, as adults, to be prepared to respond to these questions before they happen, in order to avoid becoming neutralized and letting a potential teaching moment pass us by.

Guest Bio

Dr. Rosemarie Allen has been an educational leader for over 30 years. She is the Founder and CEO of the Center for Equity & Excellence, and her life's work has been centered on ensuring all children have access to developmentally and culturally appropriate, high-quality early childhood education. Dr. Allen also serves as the President and CEO for the Institute for Racial Equity & Excellence (IREE) and she is currently an Associate Professor at the School of Education at Metropolitan State University, Denver. She is a renowned national expert on implicit bias and culturally responsive practices, and she has had the distinct honor of being appointed as a "Global Leader", connecting with world leaders in early childhood across the globe. Dr. Allen earned her B.A. from California State University, Long Beach, her Master of Education degree from Lesley University, and her Doctorate in Equity and Leadership in Education from the University of Colorado, Denver.

General Facilitator Tips

- Read through all the questions first.
- Reiterate that the purpose of the discussion is to learn from each other.
- Create an agreement with everyone in the discussion group that helps create a safe, nonjudgmental atmosphere—talking about race can be difficult.
- Be sensitive as to how people identify.
- Be prepared for a response to any remarks that might be offensive. The person saying it may not be aware that it is offensive, so be gentle in pointing it out.

Group Agreements

Ground rules and group agreements are a way to respect safety. Ask members to brainstorm and collectively determine group agreements. Here are some agreements tools to use as a reference:

- [Group agreement information from Seeds for Change](#)
- [Community Agreements tool from Just Lead Washington](#)
- [Sample group agreement from GSAFE](#)

Questions for Discussion

- Dr. Allen mentioned that, although race and racism were frequently talked about at home, even as a young child, her first long-term experience interacting with white individuals was in elementary school. She was given specific instructions on how to behave, i.e. “don’t embarrass the family,” “work hard,” “do your best.” She also mentioned that having a white teacher led to guarded and measured feelings, where she felt she had to be intentional about everything and she could not just be herself. Today, the significant majority of teachers continue to be white and they are largely unprepared to adequately meet the needs of their Black and brown students. What is your first memory talking about race and/or racism? As a white person or a person of color, was the color of your teacher’s skin ever a concern? Do you feel you were treated equally as your Black/brown/white peers by your teachers when you were a child? Was race and racism ever discussed in your classroom outside the context of a history book or Black History Month?
- Dr. Allen shared her own experience as a parent having to talk to her children about race and racism. She stated that her children were one of very few, and in some cases the only, Black children in their class. They spoke with their daughter about race and racism when she started kindergarten. However, she and her husband had to have this conversation with their now-adult son when he was only 3 years old, given that Black boys tend to be harshly disciplined and reprimanded at a significantly higher rate than their white peers. She called this the Black Parent’s Dilemma: “When do you break your child’s heart?”. This is still true today, with research showing that Black children are four times more likely to be suspended than white children. How do you believe this contributes to the development of a young Black child’s, specifically a young Black boy’s, identity? How can school districts, colleges and universities better prepare and support white educators to work with Black and brown children? What policies should state and federal education departments and local school districts implement to address and help eliminate this issue?
- Dr. Allen mentioned that she felt the need to teach her children to be “play initiators,” given that they encountered hesitant children in playgrounds on several occasions. She stated that, although that hesitation is very natural for children who have not had a lot of interaction with children of other races, it is important to encourage your child to play and interact with all children. We also know that adults are often uncomfortable “pointing out” race to their children. However, research shows that talking positively and explicitly about race with children creates more positive attitudes about people of different races. What are some things parents and caregivers can do at home and early on to introduce racial and cultural differences to their children? What are some ways in which parents can respond to children who show fear of playing with children of color or comment on a person’s skin color, hair, language or clothing? What responses do you have or would you add to your treasure chest?
- Dianne brought up an exchange between Senator Ted Cruz and Ketanji Brown Jackson regarding the book “Antiracist Baby.” Dianne then pointed out how the exchange reveals a huge misunderstanding around how children learn about race and racism. Dr. Allen then went on to explain that babies begin to become aware of race at about 3 months old and as they grow and begin to categorize people based on race, just like they do everything else, they also begin to pick up on adult social cues about race. Children quickly pick up on what their parents, teachers and caregivers say (and don’t say), who they see on TV, what their dolls look like and how other people are treated. Unfortunately, many times, intentionally and unintentionally, adults send messages to children telling them that they prefer one race over another, and often times, white children may end up with the messaging that other races don’t matter. We as adults condition children to think this way. Can you think of a time when you may have unintentionally been sending an incorrect message? Perhaps, when it comes to customer service, you prefer to be helped by a person of a certain race? Have you ever taken the

time to “Stop, notice, wonder why and change your behavior?” If not, can you think of any instances where you should have?

- Dr. Allen talked about unhealed generational trauma and how it affects both white and Black adults and children. She also mentioned how Antiracism work is being attacked and labeled Critical Race Theory when, in fact, it is American History. Can you think of some recent events that may have stemmed from generational trauma? Do you think these recent events will contribute to future generational trauma? Is healing from this trauma something you believe will happen in your lifetime? Do you consider yourself to be an ally in this work? What are some ways in which you can begin or continue to support Antiracism work in your community and other places (i.e. work, school, place of worship)?

Closing the Discussion

As you are closing your discussion, encourage people to continue learning about the importance of learning about the history and experiences of other cultural communities. Acknowledge key points and lessons learned during the discussion. Finally, share additional resources participants can use to continue learning.

Additional Resources

- Embrace Race: <https://www.embracerace.org/>
- Little Moments Count: <https://www.littlemomentscount.org/racial-justice-resources>
- Embark Behavioral Health: <https://www.embarkbh.com/blog/intergenerational-trauma-and-racism/>
- Motherly: <https://www.mother.ly/parenting/raising-race-conscious-children/>
- American Psychological Association: <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2021/06/anti-racist-children>

Early Risers is a podcast from Little Moments Count, produced by Minnesota Public Radio (MPR). This discussion guide was created in partnership with Think Small Institute and was prepared and presented by Little Moments Count and MPR, 2022.

